A SCALE FOR MEASURING THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP AMONG MALES

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Abstract

The marital relationship can be a source of both social support and chronic role stress. Since these factors are not independent of one another, they should be conceptualized in relation to the latent variable marital relationship. A factor analysis of 32 items measuring various dimensions of positive and negative marital interaction produced one latent factor. Items of emotional closeness and concern had the highest factor loadings. The whole scale may be used as well as single-item, crude indicators of the general appraisal of the marital relationship. These variables were shown to be correlates of important dimensions of outcome of the stress process.

Introduction

The conjugal bond is a major interpersonal relationship in the social network of adult persons. The spouse is frequently the most important attachment figure and the closest emotional relationship that individuals possess. Core human requirements for affection, intimacy, social approval and belongingness are met by every-day positive social interaction between the marital partners. In crisis situations, such as serious illness, the spouse is frequently the chief source of socio-emotional and tangible support. Turner et al. (1982) have defined experienced social support as follows: "Social support thus refers to the clarity or certainty with which the individual experiences being loved, valued, and able to count on others should the need arise" (15). Much social support is the product of every-day family life of which the receiver is not aware until some exigency, such as widowhood or divorce, separates him or her from the other marital partner. The measurement of this unexperienced social support poses a major problem for the adequate operationalization of social support as the "provisions of social relationships" (Weiss, 1974).

The marital relationship can also be a source of chronic...
life stress. Marital conflict, non-reciprocity in give and take and emotional isolation are important dimensions of chronic role strain in the marriage (Pearlin et al., 1978). A lack of common interests and emotional closeness, as well as the absence of genuine involvement and concern between the marital partners, lead to what Weiss (1974) has termed "the loneliness of emotional isolation". Socio-emotional support and emotional isolation are thus two sides of the same coin. They are the gratification or non-gratification of basic needs for affection, security, trust, intimacy, belongingness, affiliation and approval (Kaplan et al. 1977). The marital relationship in its twofold function as a source of stress and of social support is thus a major aspect of the social context in which adaptation to a life event occurs. Stress and support variables are not independent of one another.

Individuals can be categorized in three groups: 1. those possessing a close marital relationship, 2. those married but not possessing such a relationship and 3. the unmarried. Whether the social institution marriage or the possession of an emotionally close heterosexual relationship are decisive here is an empirical question for further investigation. The marital relationship can be conceptualized relative to key dimensions of social interaction and social support. These include the following:
- emotional closeness and affection
- involvement and intimacy
- adequacy of the sexual relationship
- common interests and gratifying leisure activities
- degree of conflict and the non-reciprocity of give and take

MATERIALS AND METHODS

These theoretical dimensions of conjugal interaction were operationalized with such items as:
- my spouse showed me in the hospital that I meant very much to her
- she is always there for me and my problems
- I could talk over my inmost feelings and fears with her in